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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AM](#) [AJ](#)
SUBJECT: BAKU UP IN ARMS OVER ALLEGED RUSSIAN WEAPONS
TRANSFER

REF: USDAO BAKU IIR 6 941 0173 09

Classified By: Deputy Chief of Mission Donald Lu, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S) Summary and Comment: Official Baku has expressed vocal concerns since January 12, when press reports surfaced that Russia allegedly had transferred a quantity of vehicles, weapons and ammunition worth USD 800 million from the Russian Base No. 102 in Gyumri, Armenia to the Armenian armed forces. Initial reports in the press listed significant items such as 21 T-72 tanks, 27 BMP-2 armored fighting vehicles, and 210 SA-6 surface-to-air missiles. A second list, circulated first by the Ministry of Defense and later made part of a GOAJ intervention at the OSCE, was more extensive and also alleged that among other systems the transfer included 4 SA-11 launchers and the associated fire control radar as well as 2 SA-13 systems. The Azerbaijani MFA summoned the Russian Ambassador January 15 to demand an explanation, and Russia answered with a note of denial to the Azerbaijani embassy in Moscow January 21. Embassy's current evaluation is that the GOAJ genuinely believes the accusations it is making and that there is unusual coordination between Ministries to disseminate the information. End Summary.

What Happened

12. (S/NF) After the initial reports in the press (January 12, beginning with the news Web site www.mediaforum.az), MOD provided Baku DATT with a document purported to be a copy of a secret order by Lieutenant General V. Golovchenko, Deputy Commander and armaments chief of the North Caucasus Military District, listing military equipment transferred from Russia's Base No. 102 at Gyumri to the Armenian military. The list includes 69 items, (details Ref IIR). MOD asserted to DATT at a meeting that the weapons were already in Armenia. A section chief from the security affairs department of MFA told Emboff separately that the mechanism for the transfer was that Russia simply left the weapons in Armenia in the process of removing them from the former Russian military base in Gudauta, in the region of Abkhazia. He said the list represented a cumulative list of what Russia had provided throughout 2008.

13. (S/NF) Emboffs separately met with the Minister of National Security on January 29. The Minister told Emboffs that the MNS originally obtained the document that MOD passed to DATT, and that the Ministry was completely certain of the

accuracy of its information. A senior MNS official alluded to another, more specific and even better-sourced report that he would share with the Embassy when he had permission to do so.

¶4. (S/NF) The Minister of National Security also gave Emboffs a readout of the Foreign Minister's meeting with the Russian Ambassador, which he said began with the Ambassador not taking the matter seriously at all - but ended with him at a loss for a good explanation.

GOAJ Coordinates its Story ...

¶5. (S/NF) The GOAJ's approach has been unusually well-coordinated. The Embassy strongly believes that this story found its way into the press as the result of a government leak, either from MOD, MNS or the Presidential Apparat. The ministries, (with the exception of MOD, who sent the list to us) while not reaching out directly to the Embassy, have been ready to talk and have provided consistent, detailed accounts of what happened. That three Ministries - Foreign Affairs, Defense and National Security, and the press, have coordinated so well clearly indicated orchestration at a level higher than an individual ministry.

Russia Fails to Respond

¶6. (C) By contrast, Russia's response in Baku's eyes has been uneven and equivocal. MOD spokesmen have contradicted each other on whether the transfer took place (initially it was basically confirmed, then angrily denied), and then the Russian MFA took almost a week to formulate a very narrowly worded denial. On January 27, the Russian Ambassador in Baku said that a meeting of the Russian and Azerbaijani Defense

Ministers would resolve the problem once and for all, but did not announce that a meeting had been scheduled nor give any idea how the meeting would be useful.

Is There Fire to Go With the Smoke?

¶7. (S/NF) While not providing definitive intelligence, some parts of the story seem plausible, and the case that the story is totally fabricated is difficult to make. The GOAJ's theory of how the weapons came to be in Armenia is consistent on its face, and Russia's responses to Azerbaijan's charges have been contradictory, delayed and unconvincing.

¶8. (S) Aspects of the Azerbaijani case do leave questions unanswered. The document provided by MOD, according to an informal analysis obtained by DATT from JAC Molesworth (Ref IIR) exhibits certain minor inconsistencies with known exemplars of Russian documentation, although it is not difficult to imagine that MNS would try to disguise its sources by packaging its intelligence, which may have come from disparate sources, for maximum effect. Embassy is also skeptical about the claim that the equipment is worth USD 800 million, but the possible exaggeration does not necessarily discredit the existence of an arms transfer of a smaller amount. It could possibly be intended for domestic consumption to raise comparisons to Russia's provision of USD 1 billion in weapons to Armenia in the aftermath of the Karabakh war - a point the Russian Ambassador raised defensively at a press conference 27 January.

Why This, Why Now?

¶9. (S/NF) The reason the GOAJ is aggressively pushing this story in the media is unclear. While over time it may be used as a pretext for a CFE-busting arms purchase, to justify a hardening of its position in N-K negotiations, or shown to be for domestic political purposes as the referendum on eliminating presidential term limits on March 18 approaches, none of these reasons are particularly compelling. Azerbaijan is already pursuing across-the-board upgrades in its military capability (although the President's rhetoric has vastly outpaced the results), its position on N-K is already basically absolute and the government is handily suppressing opposition to the referendum.

¶10. (S) It is likely that the GOAJ will later use this story as a lever on the United States to argue for increased

military support and to accuse the West of ignoring Azerbaijan's legitimate security problems. However, it would be strange if that were the only reason for a fairly elaborate disinformation ploy. A more direct theory is that if this were simply GOAJ disinformation it would be directed at Russia. Baku may, for example, be laying the groundwork for a foreign policy decision against Moscow's interests and thus is establishing a solid pretext for this, but this is doubtful. It could be a negative reaction to Russia's role in convening the recent Armenian-Azerbaijan Summit in Moscow that appeared to result in pressure on Azerbaijan to renounce the use of force to retake Nagorno-Karabakh.

¶11. (S/NF) The apparent coordination and readiness to respond to our inquiries on the part of the GOAJ is notable. Embassy believes this indicates very high-level, i.e. above ministerial-level coordination, but it is unclear who is pulling the strings. The issue is confused by the fact that the Chief of the Presidential Apparatus, Ramiz Mehdiyev, is almost the only official who could be expected to organize on this level, yet his pro-Russian proclivities are well-known. We note that President Aliyev has made no public statement on the matter while traveling, but has been in Baku during some of this time and has apparently done nothing to throttle back the GOAJ's expressions of displeasure.

Comment

¶12. (S) On balance, it appears - based on our outreach to the Foreign, National Security and Defense Ministries - that the GOAJ does believe its claims that Russia has recently provided Armenia a major military boost. If the GOAJ is correct, then Russia - a Minsk Group co-chair country - has given a military boost to one of the sides in a conflict it is supposed to be mediating. While the most serious effects

of a Russian arms transfer to Armenia would be felt in the context of the N-K negotiations; there would almost certainly be a CFE issue. If any of these arms ended up in N-K, ironically they would be counted against Azerbaijan's CFE limits. The Embassy expects the Ministry of National Security to provide soon a more detailed account of the intelligence on this alleged arms transfer. The Embassy welcomes a rigorous Intelligence Community evaluation of this information as well as the arms transfer document passed by the Ministry of Defense.

¶13. (S) Azerbaijan believes the essence of its charges and has dressed them up for domestic consumption and to lend credibility and specificity. We do not believe that this arms transfer, if the list is accurate, would decisively alter the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia, but nor would it be insignificant. Its greatest significance, if true, would be in what it would reveal about Russian intentions. Embassy does not believe that Moscow's denials (which, depending on the source, have been far from consistent) are the end of the story. Russia should be asked, as a Minsk Group co-chair, to explain what has happened.

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